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Joining our palms, we venerate the King of Dharmas. It generates measureless wonderful spiritual phrases. All evil demons return to the proper teaching. Chih Mei and Wang Liang ghosts find it hard to escape or hide.

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俞淨意公遇灶神記

The Record of Scholar Yu Jingyi's Encounter with the Hearth Deity

鍾佰晟 英譯

English Translated by Brian Chung

明朝嘉靖年間，江西有一位姓俞的先生，名都，字良臣，才識淵博。

十八歲就中了秀才(生員)，每次考試結果都是優秀。成年後，家境貧寒，靠教書為生，與同鄉十幾個書生結成「文昌社」，相約要愛惜字紙、放生、戒邪淫、戒口過（言辭謹慎），實行了很多年。但他前後經過七次考試，都沒有考中（舉人）。生了五個兒子，有四個兒子因病夭折。第三子十分聰明俊秀，左腳底有雙痣，夫妻倆都很疼愛他。八歲時在巷中玩耍走失，不知去向。生了四個女兒，僅存活了一個。

妻子因兒女的原因終日以淚洗面，把眼睛都哭瞎了。俞公窮困潦倒，一年不如一年。

反省時又覺得自己沒有什麼大的過錯，為什麼上天會給自己這麼重的懲罰呢？四十多歲後，每年臘月底，他就書寫黃紙文疏，向灶神祈禱，請求代為傳達給上天。這樣又過了幾年，也沒有什麼感應，直到四十七歲。除夕之夜，與瞎妻和女兒坐在一起，滿目蕭條，倍感淒涼。忽然

During the reign of the Ming Emperor Jiajing [1521-1567], Yu Du of Jiangxi, courtesy name Liang Chen, was a talented gentleman and scholar well versed in many arts.

At the age of eighteen, he passed the preliminary imperial examinations at the county level with flying colors and attained the rank of Shengyuan [the first of the three scholarly honors]. However, throughout his entire life, his finances remained poor, and he eked out a living as a private tutor. He and a dozen of peer scholars in his hometown established the Wen Chang 文昌 Society [an association that promoted the teachings of the Lord Superior Wen Chang—the guardian god of scholars]. They vowed to cherish scriptures, release captive animals, and abstain from sexual misconduct, killing, and offensive speech. They cultivated for many years in this way. During this time, Yu Du took the triennial provincial examinations [to obtain the second scholarly honor of Juren] a total of seven times and failed each of them. Moreover, four of his five sons died young. His third son, who was much loved by Yu and his wife and a talented child with a double birth mark under his left foot, went missing at the age of eight while playing outside. And of his four daughters, only one survived.

His wife, who cried and grieved constantly over their lost and deceased children, eventually went blind. By the time Yu Du was middle aged, he was utterly destitute.

Yu Du reflected on his own behavior, and believing that he had not committed any serious misdeeds, could not accept the heavy misfortunes that Heaven had given him. From age forty onwards, on the eve of each lunar new year, he wrote a petition [on yellow paper to be ritually burnt as an offering] to the Hearth Spirit, and entreated the deity to submit it to the Jade Emperor on his behalf. For many years, there was no response...until the year he turned forty seven. On New Year's Eve when he, his wife, and only surviving daughter were huddled together amid desolate misery, they heard

聽到敲門聲。

俞公拿著蠟燭去看，見是一位頭紮角巾身穿黑衣的人（此乃道家穿著），鬚髮花白，行禮後就座，自稱姓張，從遠道而回，聽說俞公家有發愁的事情，特地前來慰問。

俞公心裡覺得此人很奇異，十分恭敬地行禮。說起平生讀書積德，至今仍功名未成，妻子殘疾兒女不全，衣食困難，還把每年給灶神的文疏給張先生誦讀。

張先生說：「我知道你家的事情已經很久了，你的意念為惡太重，做事光圖虛名，滿紙的怨天尤人，褻瀆上天，恐怕受到的懲罰還不止這些。」

俞公大吃一驚問：「聽說冥冥之中，哪怕做一點善事都會記錄下來。我發誓做善事，恪守規條已經很久了，難道都是光圖虛名嗎？」

張先生回答：「就說你們規條中所約定愛惜字紙一款吧。你的學生和朋友們，多用舊的文書圖冊糊窗裏物，甚至用來擦桌子，用完後藉口不能玷污，隨即用火燒掉。你每天都親眼所見，沒有告誡過一句。只是在路上偶然碰到字紙，拾回來用火燒掉，有什麼用呢？」

文昌社每月放生，你也隨波逐流，因人成事。如果別人不去做，你也就放棄了。其實內心一點都沒有動過慈悲的念頭。況且你家還在吃蝦蟹之類，牠們難道就不是生命了嗎？」

再說『戒口過』這件事，你能言善辯，強詞奪理，大家與你交談常常被你折服。你當時話一出口，心裡也知道傷人太深，但因為朋友們熟慣了，隨意取笑，不能禁止。語言中往往觸怒鬼神，暗中給你做惡的批註不可勝數。你還以為自己寬厚忍讓，你這是欺騙誰呢？難道你能欺天嗎？」

邪淫之事雖無實際行為，但你見到人家的美貌女子，一定會久久凝視，心旌搖曳，不能自己，只是沒有機會去接近罷了。你自己反省當時的情況，真的能像魯國的正人君子那樣坐懷不亂嗎？還說自己一輩子不近邪色，可以面對天地鬼神，真是妄想呀！

a knock at the door.

Yu Du then held a candle and greeted the unexpected guest—a gentleman dressed in black who wore a cloth headdress [often worn by Taoist hermits]. His hair and beard were half grey. The gentleman introduced himself as Mr. Zhang, and said that while passing by from afar, he heard sounds of sorrow from Yu Du's home, and wanted to console them.

Yu Du noticed that the gentleman was very special in appearance, and thus treated him with utmost respect. Yu Du then poured his heart out, mentioning how, despite his diligent studying, good deeds, and lack of major faults, he was beset by myriad misfortunes—failure to obtain scholarly honors, the death of his children, blindness of his wife, crippling poverty, as well as the other complaints he listed in his annual petitions to the Hearth Deity.

Mr. Zhang replied, "I have long been familiar with the circumstances of your household. The wickedness of your mind is massive; you are hypocritical and vainly do good only for show. Your memorials to Heaven are all unrepentant and hate-filled. I'm afraid Heaven will be forced to chastise you further."

Surprised, Yu Du replied, "But I heard that even the smallest good deed is recorded by the spirits! How could all the vows I have kept and the good I have done, be false and hypocritical?"

Zhang explained to him, "Let us take the example of cherishing scriptures, which is one of the rules of your society. Every day, you see your pupils or friends disrespect old scriptures by using them to paper their windows [grease paper windows], wrap objects, or even wipe their desks before ritually burning them, yet you never say a word of reproach. However, when you encounter a stray piece of scripture in public, you make a big show of ritually burning it [the proper way to retire old texts]. Is this not hypocrisy?"

Moreover, your society liberates life every month, and though you are a founding member, you merely go with the flow. If others do not organize the life-liberation events, the matter would be an afterthought for you. Thus, you have no actual compassion and mercy. Besides, your family is still consuming shrimps and shellfish—are they not living beings as well?

Let us move on to your offensive speech. You are eloquent and persuasive—a powerful debater. Though your conscience tells you to carefully guard your tongue, you often forget yourself when you are among your friends and acquaintances. Thus, you unleash a torrent of sarcasm and ridicule, enraging the ghosts and spirits with your sharp tongue. You have committed this hidden

這是你們規條中發誓奉行的，尚且如此，何況其餘方面。你每年所焚告的文疏，都已告知上天，天帝命令日游使者來觀察你的善惡，幾年之中沒有一件善事可記。反而在你獨處之時，可以見到你的貪念、淫念、嫉妒念、急功近利的念頭；自以為是、輕慢別人的念頭；追念往昔、期望將來的念頭；報恩復仇的念頭，充斥於胸，不可勝數。這些種種惡念在心中固結，被天神記錄得太多了。上天懲罰你也就一天比一天厲害。你躲避災禍還來不及，還怎麼能祈求福報呢？」

俞公聽完後惶恐不已，伏地流淚說：「您既然能知曉幽微之事，一定是神仙，請您救度我。」

張先生說：「你知書明禮，也知道羨慕善行、善言，以此為樂。當你聽到善言時，激動不已，見到一件善事時，不勝鼓舞。但是過去就忘了，原本信根不深，又沒有恆心來鞏固，所以平生所行善言善行，都是敷衍了事，何嘗有一件事是發自內心的。而且滿腔意惡，起伏纏綿，還想責備上天沒有降福。這就象種了遍地荊棘，卻癡心妄想收穫禾稻，難道不荒謬嗎？」

你從今以後，要把所有的貪淫、刻薄、妄想、其他雜念，先下大力氣徹底改正，讓內心一塵不染保持清淨。只有一個念頭，就是一心向善。

如果有能力辦到的善事，就耐心去做，如果能力達不到，也要勤勤懇懇，使這個善意圓滿。第一要有忍耐心，第二要有恆心。千萬不可懈怠懶惰，不可自欺欺人，長期做下去自然會有意想不到的效驗。

你家對待我十分虔誠恭敬，特意來回報你，趕快勉力修持，尚可挽回天意。」

evil [sharp and eloquent speech is often admired by people, but is actually a karmic offense] countless times. Yet you think of yourself as an honest and magnanimous person. Do you really think you could deceive Heaven?

Furthermore, while it is true that you have not actually committed sexual misconduct, you still gaze lasciviously whenever you encounter beautiful women. If the opportunity for an illicit affair ever presented itself, you wouldn't be able to resist. For instance, if you were tempted like the Gentleman from Lu [a man from the Spring and Autumn period famous for resisting temptation], do you think you could have remained pure like him? Thus, your arrogant claim that you have always been chaste and you can face Heaven and Earth, the Ghosts and Spirits, is only false thinking.

As you have failed to hold even these vows [precepts of the Wen Chang Society], how much more numerous are your other offenses? The annual petitions you have ritually burnt have been submitted to the Jade Emperor, and His Majesty has ordered Spirit Observers to record your good and evil—but they have not found a single good deed to record in all these years. On the other hand, they have seen that when you're alone, your heart is swamped by avarice, lust, jealousy, arrogance, vengeful thoughts, being opinionated, and being eager for quick success and instant benefit. You are obsessed with your past and fantasize about your future. With myriad such thoughts overflowing from your heart, the Spirits have observed enough. As you can barely escape further divine punishment, what makes you think you are entitled to blessings?"

Yu Du fell to the ground in trepidation, and tearfully begged, "My lord, as you know all of these hidden things, you must be a god or deity. Please save me!"

Zhang continued, "You are a gentlemanly scholar well versed in scripture and the rules of propriety. You also rejoice in admiring virtuous behavior, feel encouraged by words of kindness, and delight in the good deeds of others. But after the sight fades, you forget. You are irresolute and have weak faith. The good deeds you do and kind things you say are all perfunctory and hesitant, with not one deed being sincere. Moreover, your heart is smothered by a dense knot of wicked thoughts. Yet you complain to Heaven that you have not received your rightful due of bountiful rewards. Are you not like the one who plants only thorns but hopes to reap a harvest of fragrant rice?"

From this day forward, whenever avarice, lust, false politeness, and wandering thoughts and the like arise, you must uproot them with all your strength, and sweep them away until no traces remain. Let all your thoughts be virtuous ones.

When you are able to do good deeds, you must do it with patience.

張先生說完後，就進了俞公的內室，俞公趕快起來跟隨，到灶下，人忽然不見。這才意識到是灶神顯靈。當下焚香叩謝。

並於次日大年初一拜禱天地，發誓痛改前非，專做善事。還改了自己的號，叫淨意道人，意在誓除各種妄念。

剛開始行動之時，雜念很多，不是懷疑就是懈惰。過了很長一段時間，依然浮沉不已。於是在家中所供的觀世音菩薩聖像面前，把頭叩出了血，恭敬地立誓發願，願善念永遠純淨，積善的功德精誠遞進，倘若有絲毫自己寬容自己的地方，就永墮地獄。

發願以後，每天清晨虔誠念誦大慈大悲觀音菩薩的尊號一百聲，以祈求暗中有神靈相助。從此後一言一行、每時每刻，都像鬼神在旁，不敢欺騙放肆。

一切對別人，乃至對萬物有利的事，事無巨細，不管自己有多忙，別人知道不知道，能力能不能達到，都懷著高興的心情去做，一定要排除萬難做成才罷手。隨緣方便，廣植陰功。

並且以倫理道德、勤奮學習、謙虛忍辱和因果報應的道理勸導大眾，逢人說教，惟恐時間不夠。

每月月底的那一天，就把一個月所行所言的事情，寫成文疏在灶神處稟告。這樣堅持做起來，成為很自然的事情，一舉一動都有許多善念相隨，一靜下來就不再產生一絲雜念。

這樣過了三年。五十歲時，也就是萬曆二年（西元一五七四年），甲戌年會考。張江陵（首相張居正）是主考官。考完後，在同鄉中為兒子尋訪品學兼優的人做老師。鄉里的人都一致推薦俞公。隨即聘請俞

If your strength proves inadequate, then diligently give it your best to demonstrate the genuineness of your virtuous intent. Foremost, you must have patience, and secondly, you must always persevere. Never deceive yourself or become indolent. Eventually, your cultivation will become unimaginably efficacious.

As you have been sincere in your offerings to me, I have come today to repay the kindness. If you move quickly, you will be able to change your destiny.”

After he had finished this statement, he walked into the interior of the house, followed by Yu Du himself, and disappeared beneath the stove. At that moment, Yu realized that his guest was the Hearth Deity (the Spirit Magistrate of Fate) and immediately burnt incense out of gratitude.

The very next day, the first day of the new lunar year, Yu Du prayed to Heaven and Earth, vowing to change his ways and sincerely do good deeds. He gave himself the courtesy name Cultivator who Purifies the Mind [Jing Yi Daoren], resolving henceforth to eradicate all wandering thoughts.

At the beginning of his practice, he continued to be swamped by distracting thoughts, bogged down by doubts, indolence, and after a long time, he was still impetuous and volatile. Troubled by this, he prostrated with utmost sincerity (to the point of bleeding his forehead) before his household shrine of Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva [Guanyin Bodhisattva], and vowed that if his good thoughts were not pure, his good deeds not diligent, or if he tolerated even a hint of complacency, he should fall forever into the hells.

Every morning at sunrise, he sincerely recited the name of The Greatly Compassionate, Greatly Benevolent Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva for a hundred times, praying for the Bodhisattva's blessings and support. From then on, he was honest in every word and deed, in each single thought and moment, treading carefully—as if ghosts and spirits were by his side recording his every deed.

Whenever there was a deed that was of benefit to a person, or even just a small critter, he did not care whether it was large or small, whether he was busy or not, whether others knew about it or not, or whether he had the strength to complete it. He enthusiastically carried it out to the best of his ability, not stopping until he had either succeeded or met the limits of his strength. He performed good deeds whenever the opportunity presented itself, and sowed the seeds of hidden merit far and wide.

Moreover, he exhorted all to be broadly compassionate, diligently study the scriptures, and practice humility and patience. He also expounded the principles of causation. He preached to all he met—converting many to goodness—lest there were not enough hours in the day for him to complete all the good deeds he was doing.

At the end of each lunar month, he reported his monthly deeds to the

公共赴京師。俞公帶著家眷上路。

張首相敬重俞公的品德，引薦到國子監（當時的官辦大學）上學。萬曆四年（西元一五七六年），丙子這一年，在京師參加鄉試，考中了舉人，次年進士及第。

一天，俞公去拜見太監楊公，楊公讓五個乾兒子出來拜謝。這些乾兒子都是楊公在各處尋覓得來的，作為自己的後嗣，等到年老時有所依靠。其中有一個兒子，十六歲，俞公看他很面熟，問他的籍貫。說是江右一帶的人，小時候誤入糧船，現在還依稀記得姓氏和街巷的景象。俞公十分驚訝，讓他脫光左腳，果然有兩個痣。俞公大呼：「這是我的兒子呀！」

楊公也很驚愕，就把孩子送還，讓他隨父親回家。俞公奔跑著告訴夫人，夫人摟著孩子大哭，眼睛中血淚迸流。孩子也哭，捧著母親的臉舐她的眼睛，母親的雙目因此復明。

俞公悲喜交集，從此不願為官，向張江陵告辭回鄉。張首相認為他是個義人，厚贈他貴重的禮物送他返鄉。俞公在鄉里居住期間，行善更加積極。他的兒子娶了媳婦，連生七個兒子，都長大成人，讀書用功，個個成名。俞公親手寫下遇灶神的過程和自己改過的經歷，用來教育子孫。後來健康長壽，直活到八十八歲壽終。大家都認為這是積德行善，得到上天福報的緣故。

同鄉晚輩羅禎實錄。❀

Hearth Spirit [out of piety and respect]. Eventually, his cultivation matured, and whenever he did something, he embodied myriad virtues, and whenever he was at rest, his mind was pure and still.

Thus, Yu practiced for three years. In the second year of the reign of the Wanli Emperor [1574], when Yu had turned fifty, Zhang Jiangling [Zhang Juzheng], the Prime Minister [from 1572-1582], was personally presiding over the metropolitan level examinations being held that year. After the exams had ended, Zhang toured his home region and wanted to find someone of good character to act as household tutor to his sons. Everyone recommended Yu Jingyi. As a result, Yu and his family moved to the national capital.

Zhang appreciated Yu Jingyi's virtue and good character, and therefore enrolled him in the Imperial Academy. In the fourth year of the reign of Wanli, he finally passed the provincial examinations, and in the year after, he obtained the rank of Jinshi [the highest scholarly honor].

One day, Yu Jingyi was invited into the home of an Imperial Household Eunuch surnamed Yang, who also asked his five adopted sons to greet him. They came from different places across the country and kept him company in his old age. One boy, sixteen years of age, looked oddly familiar, so Yu asked where he was from. The boy, who still remembered his original surname and had memories of his hometown, replied, "I am from the Jiang region. When I was very little, I accidentally boarded a grain ship and became lost." Yu was very surprised, and immediately asked the boy to show him his left foot—where he saw the double birth mark of his lost son. He exclaimed: "You are my son!"

Astonished by the touching scene unfolding before him, Yang blessed this reunion of father and son. Yu rushed to tell his wife, and when the blind mother tearfully embraced her son, she shed tears of blood. The crying boy then clutched his mother's face and kissed her eyes—causing her sight to be instantly restored!

Having experienced both the joys and sorrows of life, he made the decision to refuse a magisterial appointment, resigned from his post as tutor, and returned home. The Prime Minister was impressed by his integrity, and thus presented him with many precious gifts before he left. Upon his return, he wholly dedicated himself to helping others. After his son married, his daughter-in-law bore seven sons in succession, and all of them later became well established in literary circles. Yu wrote down his encounter with the Hearth Deity and his efforts to change his destiny as a record for his posterity. He thereafter enjoyed health and longevity for the rest of his life, living until the ripe old age of eighty-eight. Everyone attributed his later good fortune as Heaven's reward for his sincere acts of goodness.

Recorded by Luo Zhen (Yu's junior of his hometown). ❀